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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7724
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1255
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4795
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8343
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5905
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1637
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1716
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000453

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/04/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [EAID](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA: CLEARER PICTURE EMERGING ON FORCED
RELOCATION

REF: A. RANGOON 448
[1](#)B. RANGOON 441
[1](#)C. RANGOON 434

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: UNHCR representatives told us they observed no instances of violent, forced relocation during a recent trip to the Delta, but spoke with a military commander who said he had orders to vacate unofficial camps north of Labutta and Bogale. The government was moving victims in an effort to consolidate camp populations, maintain crowd control, make the victims less visible, and prod people to resume their livelihoods. Victims were also returning to their villages voluntarily for fear the government would reallocate their land to others. UNHCR has seen no evidence the effort is targeted at specific ethnic or religious groups. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Pol/econ chief met with UNHCR Deputy Country Director Marc Rappaport and UNHCR Emergency Response Specialist Andrei Kazakov, who recently returned on a trip from Labutta and Bogale to investigate claims of forced relocation. Kazakov stated that during his trip he did not observe any forced relocation, but visited monasteries and camps whose occupants had been told to leave by the government. Kazakov spoke with a tactical commander in Bogale, who told him he had orders to empty out all unofficial camps north of Bogale and Labutta. The reason, he stated, was because the government did not have the personnel or facilities to oversee and manage the unofficial camps. Cyclone victims sheltering in schools were evicted by May 27, so that the schools could resume classes on June 2.

[1](#)3. (C) Kazakov also said the GOB tried to consolidate camp populations to maintain control of cyclone victims, and encouraged as many cyclone victims as possible to return to their villages and resume planting rice and fishing. Many victims had found shelter with relatives and friends, others with nowhere to go were being relocated to official camps in different locations.

[1](#)4. (C) Rappaport said it did not appear that the

government's intention was to force all victims back to their villages, but rather to reduce their visibility before large numbers of international humanitarian staff entered the Delta. There was an element of pride and face-saving in this strategy, he noted, and it was also a method of crowd control. Additionally, many of the unofficial shelters were overcrowded and did not have adequate sanitation facilities. During a separate visit to the Delta, poloff observed 1,000 people living in a small hallway of a monastery (septel). Consolidation of camps in a large natural disaster was logical, but the GOB's implementation was flawed, Kazakov observed. He also spoke with several people who said they returned to their villages voluntarily because they were concerned the government would reallocate their land because it was not being cultivated. (Note: in Burma, the government owns all the land and individuals have user rights. If the government deems the land is not being used, it will reallocate it to others. This is a common occurrence throughout the country, which has led to human rights abuses. End note.)

15. (C) Kazakov and Rappaport said the government had some kind of rehabilitation plan in place, though it had not been shared with the UN yet. Kazakov, as well as USAID officers traveling separately to the Delta, observed several trucks of water buffalo being transported to the Delta for rice farmers to use. He interviewed several farmers who said the government was giving 20-30 water buffalo and farm machinery to some village tracts to manage communally. Individuals who wanted to purchase and own their own water buffalo could do so with assistance of a three-year government loan. Other farmers told him they had applied to the government for free paddy seed and were waiting for their rations.

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16. (C) Rappaport stressed that government relief efforts, along with UN agencies and INGOs, had reached some people, but the assistance was a "drop-in-the-bucket" compared to what was needed. Kazakov showed pol/econ chief a government map that marked the area south of Bogale as an uninhabited nature reserve. According to the GOB, no villages existed in this area. In reality, thousands of people had migrated to this area over the last several years to informally cultivate the land. Many of these villages were hard hit by Nargis and had not received relief supplies they needed. The UN had mobilized its local staff in Bogale to begin mapping the area to seek out needy victims. The joint assessment team also plans to visit some of these areas.

17. (C) Asked about the possibility of ethnic and religious communities being targeted or violent force being used to relocate people, both Kazakov and Rappaport found no evidence of this. UNHCR had extremely good relations with Karen and Muslim organizations from UNHCR's work in Southeast Burma and Northern Rakhine State. None of these organizations had reported that their communities were denied humanitarian assistance or singled out for relocation due to religion or ethnicity. Kazakov reported running into several journalists in the Delta. If abuses were taking place on a large scale, he believed there would be more international media reports documenting it.

18. (C) Comment: A picture is beginning to emerge of an inept government effort to get cyclone victims back to farming and move them out of schools before the beginning of the school year. The UN early-on had cautioned the GOB against setting up large refugee camps, and instead urged the GOB to permit disaster experts to go in and set up basic infrastructure so victims could return quickly. The UN and ASEAN face a monumental task of educating the GOB on how proper relief efforts are conducted, and trying to coordinate the government's efforts with its own. The joint assessment that begins next week will be a first step, but the long-term effort is likely to be frustrating and go more slowly than we wish. As long as the international community can gain access

to the remote regions, the chances will significantly increase that victims will voluntarily return to their land with some assurance of getting their basic needs met. End comment.

VILLAROSA